

**Neighborhood Ten Study**  
**Committee Meeting #7**  
**April 28, 2005**  
**Transportation**

**Committee members present:** Rebekah Kaufman, Henry Lukas, Joan Marszalek, Chip Strang, Rachel Cobb, Bill Forster, Sandra Uyterhoeven, Ravi Sundaram, Robert Putnam, Primo Vannicelli

**Staff present:** Elaine Thorne, Taha Jennings, Sue Clippinger, Susanne Rasmussen, Juan Avendano

**Welcome and introductions:**

The meeting began with the introduction of the City staff from the Community Development Department and the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department: Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning in the Community Development Department, Juan Avendano, the Traffic Calming Project Manager in the Department, and Sue Clippinger, the Director of the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department presented information on transportation policies, and programs, for the City as well as Neighborhood Ten.

The presentation consisted of several segments as well as questions and discussion from the Committee.

- Transportation policies and programs in the City
- Traffic calming and other transportation projects in Neighborhood Ten
- City parking policy
- Transportation trends
- Traffic studies

**Transportation Presentation**

**Transportation Policies and Programs**

Susanne Rasmussen began the presentation with an overview of the transportation initiatives in the City as well as some of the policies behind them:

- Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance, 1992
- Growth Policy Document
- 1998 Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Ordinance
- 2000 Pedestrian Plan
- Climate Protection Plan 2002

These initiatives focus on the following program areas

- Infrastructure
- Bicycles
- Pedestrian amenities
- Public transportation

Some of the transportation projects that have recently taken place or are planned and have a direct impact on Neighborhood Ten include:

- Fresh Pond Parkway Project, which helped to re-connect Fresh Pond Reservation with the residential areas of Neighborhood Ten and allows pedestrians to more easily cross Fresh Pond Parkway.
- Traffic calming projects, which lowered vehicle speeds and increased pedestrian safety.
- Enhancements in pedestrian and bicycle mobility through engineering, education, enforcement, and encouragement.
- Public transit improvements - the City works closely with Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), specifically through meetings every other month, to address service planning, condition of stations, and other issues.

Susanne pointed out that a lot of traffic in Cambridge has no origin or destination within the city, and noted traffic on Memorial Drive and Fresh Pond Parkway as examples.

### **Questions**

*How much power does the City actually have with the MBTA?*

It helps to have support voiced from residents. When there is broad support for an improvement there is usually a better response. There are going to be new bus shelters installed throughout the City this spring and summer through a private vendor.

*Does the City have any authority over Memorial Drive? The intersection with Hawthorne Street is a dangerous place for pedestrians to cross because of high vehicle speeds.*

The City lobbies the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) with concerns about roadways under their jurisdiction. However, very little roadway work is funded by the State. It is important that residents contact the State about concerns with its roadways as well.

### **Traffic Calming / Infrastructure Improvements**

Juan Avendano explained that the City selects locations for transportation improvements such as traffic calming and re-striping based on other infrastructure work that is planned for a given street. This is so that all planned improvements can be done as part of a single construction project, which is very cost effective. Examples in Neighborhood Ten are Aberdeen Avenue and Fresh Pond Parkway, which as part of major sewer and drainage work also underwent roadway, lane making, and bicycle/pedestrian improvements.

Juan noted that Mount Auburn Street, between Story Street and Fresh Pond Parkway, is scheduled for re-paving (grind and overlay only) and the project may also include some traffic calming (crossing islands, crosswalks, etc.). There will be a public meeting sometime in May regarding this issue. Construction is anticipated to begin by July 2005.

### **Questions**

*How is the effectiveness of a traffic-calming project evaluated?*

In some cases there are counts taken on the number of cars yielding to pedestrians before and after a traffic-calming project. Speeds are also measured before and after a project.

*Does traffic calming address speed and noise generated by large trucks? Can trucks be discouraged from certain areas through increased enforcement?*

There are not traffic calming measures used that specifically address truck speeds or noise. There was an attempt at a citywide nighttime ban on trucks, and it remains an ongoing issue at City Council. However, this type of ban would have to be carefully coordinated with the State as well.

*What is the cost of adding a traffic island on a street?*

The project cost would have to take into account required staff, design work, and community process.

*Is the City able to improve state roads if it was willing to pay the costs?*

This can be a very complex undertaking in terms of permitting, legal issues, and maintenance. The City does not have an infinite amount of funding available. There have been some notable successes for the City when working with the State: Cambridge Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee, River Street and Memorial Drive intersection improvements, and Western Avenue and Memorial Drive intersection improvements.

*Why are the lane striping improvements only on one side of the Huron and Fresh Pond Parkway intersection?*

The lane markings on Huron Avenue at Fresh Pond Parkway are going to be re-evaluated.

*Can Cambridge Police go after someone at the Huron Avenue Fresh Pond Parkway intersection for disobeying traffic signal?*

Red light running is a big issue, however, police enforcement should not be the only tool used to deal with it. Installing cameras at certain intersections is currently being debated. City staff will also try and assist and or advice residents on traffic issues that are out the City's control.

*Are traffic lights used to slow vehicle speeds?*

Traffic lights are generally not used to slow traffic because drivers tend to actually speed up in order to make the green light.

*How is the City going to deal with the traffic impacts associated with new Harvard development in Allston?*

The State is undertaking a large transportation study for Allston Landing. The City will monitor the progress.

## **Parking Policy**

Sue Clippinger, explained that the Traffic, Transportation, and Parking Department has the authority to regulate curbs and issue street and parking permits and passes, throughout the City. She further noted that curb space is becoming an increasingly scarce resource in Cambridge and it is therefore important to balance different needs. There are no parking accommodations for people commuting to the City.

## **Questions**

*What can be done regarding the abuse of visitor parking permits?*

The Department monitors the situation when it is notified of a specific problem and will take necessary measures, but it is still difficult to enforce.

*How is a decision made to eliminate on-street parking spaces for road improvements?  
Were any parking spaces eliminated on Brattle Street?*

Many times no parking is actually eliminated, but there is a community process, and residents, owners, and businesses are notified through mailings, and hand-flyering.

### **Trends**

Susanne Rasmussen noted that less than 20% of trips in Cambridge are related to work. The City assumes a 0.5% increase per year in traffic. However, these are only assumptions and can be affected by things such as economic cycle. There has also been a significant increase in car ownership. There is evidence that transportation programs and initiatives are having an effect. According to U.S. Census data, between 1990 and 2000, fewer people that live in Cambridge drove to work. The general breakdown of work trips is 25% walk, 25% transit, and 4% bicycling. However, it is hard to get information on non-work trips. Someone stated that the resources required for bike lanes don't seem to be justified by only 4% of work trips.

### **Questions**

*What is the level of use of bike lanes and projections for the future?*

Bicycling has increased, but is at low levels overall, and may be hard to notice.

*How are bicycle rules enforced?*

Through the Police Department, there are education and enforcement. There has been a warning phase and some tickets have been issued.

### **Traffic Impact Studies**

Sue Clippinger explained that when a large development (over 50,000 square feet) is proposed, it must be granted a special permit by the Planning Board. Part of the special permit process for large projects includes a detailed study of the project's traffic impacts. The study must information on traffic impacts for the following indicators: project vehicle trip generation, change in Level of Service (LOS) at certain intersections, increased volume of trips on residential streets, increase of length of vehicle queues at certain intersections, lack of sufficient pedestrian or bicycle facilities. If it is determined that there are substantial adverse impacts, the developer must provide mitigation measures. Some examples of traffic mitigation include: transportation Demand Management Plans, roadway, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities improvements measures to reduce traffic on nearby streets, safety improvements particularly at key intersections.

The City is currently reviewing traffic impact assumptions for The Mount Auburn Hospital expansion project. It was noted that nothing has yet been submitted to the Planning Board regarding this project.

### **Questions**

*What is the role of the general public during the different stages of a traffic study?*

There is no public process specifically for traffic studies. It is simply a tool used by the planning board to make informed decisions. However, the studies are available to the public and City staff will work with the general public to explain the information.